2.

THE VANITY of SCOFFING: OR A LETTER TO A WITTY GENTLEMAN,

Evidently Shewing

THE

Great *Weakneſs* and *Unreaſonableneſs* of *Scoffing* at the Chriſtian's *Faith*, on account of its ſuppoſed *uncertainty*.

Together with

The *Madneſs* of the *Scoffer's* unchriſtian *Choice*.

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2 Pet. III. 3.

There ſhall come in the laſt days Scoffers, walking after their own luſts.

Deut. XXXII. 29.

O that they were wiſe, that they underſtood this, that they would conſider their latter end.

LONDON,

Printed for *R. Royſton*, Bookſeller to his moſt Sacred Majeſty, at the Angel in *Amen-Corner*, 1674.

THE *VANITY* of *SCOFFING*.

A LETTER.

Sir,

I AM moſt heartily ſorry, not for my own ſake but your's, that any thing from *you* ſhould create me a trouble of this nature. That a perſon honourably deſcended of noble and Chriſtian Parents, ſolemnly dedicated at his firſt appearance in the World to the ſervice of our bleſſed *Jeſus*, adorned richly with the moſt excellent natural indowments, wanting no help to nature, which an ingenuous and religious education could adminiſter, plentifully enjoying all the opportunities of knowing, and all the incouragements to do whatever is truly vertuous and noble, things acceptable to God, and beneficial to the world; that a perſon ſo every way ac-

compliſhed as you are, ſhould now begin to entertain with pleaſure thoughts bordering upon *Atheiſm*, and give your ſelf up to a courſe of life ſo far unworthy of him that bears the name of *Chriſtian*, that it makes it a flattery to call you a *Man*: is, I muſt needs ſay, ſo great an aſtoniſhment to me, that I can hardly believe that this Letter which I am now writing to you, can any way concern you. Yet ſome ill-ſounding words which with no ſmall grief I heard from you, in the laſt diſcourſe we had together, have been ſo great a diſturbance to my mind ever ſince, that I could not poſſibly give my ſelf any reſt, till I ſet pen to paper, that I might contribute ſomething, though it be but a very little, in reſpect of what others out of their greater ſtock of *reaſon* (I will not ſay of *charity*) would have done, towards the ſhaking off your haſty and dangerous reſolutions, and blunting the edge of that *Scoffing* wit, which incourageth you to hope for ſo eaſie a victory over the *Faith* of us deſpiſed *Chriſtians*; but will certainly at laſt, if not timely wreſted from you by the charity of ſome of thoſe whom you moſt hate, wound your ſelf to the very heart. I will not beg your pardon, either for this my ſo confident aſſertion, or for preſuming to interrupt your ſecure ſlumbers, and pleaſing dreams, with this paper. You know my *Faith*, and that I think I have as good aſſurance of the truths I *believe*, as the moſt conceited *Philoſopher* of you all thinks he hath of any concluſion grounded on the common principles of natural *reaſon*, or his ſo much magnified evidence of *ſenſe*. And you either

ther know as well, or I wiſh you did, that we poor ſilly *Chriſtians* are taught to love moſt heartily even you who moſt deſpiſe us, and eſpecially that part of you, which you ſeem leaſt to know, and therefore cannot love, your *Soul*. This invites us to repay your *ſcorn* with *pity*, and rather than not attempt to do you good, for the evil we receive at your hands, run the hazard of being yet more hated by you. But yet far more than this, the zeal we have for thoſe *divine*, and *only* beauties we admire, I mean thoſe ſacred truths which you *deride*, but we *believe*, and own our ſelves obliged to vindicate with all the skill we have, conſtrains us to be thus importunate, though we ſhould be ſure thereby to loſe not your favour only, but even whatſoever in *this* world we can think moſt dear unto us. With this reſolution of contemning all your ready cenſures of *bold*, *troubleſome* and *unmannerly*, if not *fool* and *knave* to boot, wherewith you have learn'd to reward the *charity* of thoſe who ſeek to do you good; I now lay before you my thoughts of what you were pleaſed to utter in my hearing.

This, *Sir*, as near as I remember it, was your language, *Chriſtians are fools, to deny themſelves the pleaſures of this world, in hopes of I know not what in a world to come. 'Tis good to make much of our ſelves here, for we know not what ſhall be hereafter. I could never yet meet with any man that could bring us any certain tidings from that other world you talk of. Who can tell us what ſhall become of us when we die? Why ſhould man be ſo proud, as to hope for an Heaven more*

than

than other creatures? It is a mere madneſs to deny our ſelves the things which delight us, and which now we may injoy, for the ſake of that which is uncertain and which we do not know that any man ever did or ſhall injoy. For my own part I am reſolved to live here as long as I can, and as merrily as I can, and let thoſe fools that dance after the pipe of a company of cheating Prieſts pleaſe themſelves with the fond hopes of a new life and a Heaven after they are dead.

Theſe, *Sir*, as I well remember, and many others much a-kin to theſe, were your expreſſions; I willingly omit your many and various *Oaths*, the uſual *graces* and *ornaments*, and indeed the only *proofs* you have of ſuch *wild* diſcourſes. I muſt confeſs I could not have believed it, if my own ears had not heard it, that ſuch words as theſe could have been *wreſted* from you; how great then was my wonder to hear them *flow* ſo freely from your mouth, as thereby to evidence themſelves to come from the great *abundance of* your *heart?* Good God! Is it poſſible that a *man*, and one that pretends to be the maſter of all *wit* and *reaſon*, ſhould ſo eaſily and with ſuch complacency degrade himſelf into a *beaſt*, and even pride himſelf in being the Author of ſuch conceits, as, if they have any real truth in them, muſt needs make him of no more worth than the *horſe* he rides upon? If you can think ſo meanly of your ſelf, I beſeech you henceforward walk on foot, and make not the poor dumb creature, which by ſubmitting himſelf ſo gently to a load, that he could as eaſily throw off, and trample under foot, ſeems to know you much better than you are wil-

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ling to know your ſelf, to feel ſo oft your whip and ſpur. What right have you to rule him, more than he hath to govern you, if you muſt both periſh alike? If you ſhould ſay that you have *reaſon*, and he hath *none*, I make no doubt but ſome of your *companions* will be ready enough to tell you, that you know that no more, than you do whether you have an *immortal Soul*, or he have *none*: Indeed you can *ſpeak* and he cannot, and ſo have you one priviledge more than he hath, to abuſe your tongue to your own ruine.

It is not my preſent purpoſe to ſhape an anſwer to all your *queſtions*, or reſolve all your *doubts*: as theſe would coſt me more pains than I am now at leiſure to beſtow upon them: ſo would it be a work of little uſe to you, till you be better *prepared* to receive it. Till that malignant and heaving humour of *pride* and *ſelf-conceit* be a little corrected, your ſtomach will be ever boiling with *diſdain*, and belch forth *reproach* and *ſcorn* on every thing that goes againſt it: your palate will remain too *bitter*, to taſte the *ſweetneſs* of the truths commended to you; and your brain too much *intoxicated*, and *giddy*, to *fix* on the ſtudy and meditation of things which call for *ſerioufneſs*. My preſent buſineſs is to try if I can poſſibly adminiſter ſomething, whereby that *humour* may be made leſs predominant, and your *reaſon* ſet a little more at liberty: then may you perhaps be content to think, that ſome body elſe beſides your ſelf may be able to ſpeak *ſence*, and ſay ſomething that may deſerve the conſideration of him who calls himſelf a *wit*:

This

This I ſhall hope in ſome meaſure to effect, if I can prevail with you to read over this *Letter* with patience, and therein the *weakneſs* of your own *reaſonings*, the *folly* and *dangers* of your ill grounded *reſolutions*, and in both, the *unreaſonableneſs* of your *crowing* over the *ſimplicity* of us *Chriſtians*.

That you may be better able to diſcover the pitiful *weakneſs* of your *reaſonings*, and how whileſt you labour to make us *Chriſtians* ſeem *fools* you unawares argue your ſelves into mere *brutes*; have but as much *patience* to read your own words from my pen, as you expreſſed *delight* and *pleaſure* in uttering them with your own tongue, and it may be, that the *ſame* things which you then thought *witty* when they proceeded immediately from your own *dear* ſelf; you may now think very *fooliſh* and *ridiculous* when they are, though moſt *faithfully* repreſented to you by *another*. Your *words* I have already ſet down, but to make them look a little more with the faces of *arguments*, and to let you ſee with what *art* and *ſtrength* you reaſon, I will once more give you them, as, had we been in *diſpute*, when you ſpake them, I ſuppoſe I ſhould have heard them from *your ſelf*.

Chriſtians deny themſelves the pleaſures of this world, (you mean they dare not commit all ſin with greedineſs) *in hopes of an uncertain happineſs in a world to come*: therefore, *Chriſtians are very fools.*

We know not what ſhall be hereafter; therefore, *It is good to make much of our ſelves* (that is, to live as we liſt, and pamper up our luſts) *whileſt we are here.* We

We could never yet receive any certain tidings out of that other world which Chriſtians talk of; therefore, *they are fools for believing there is any ſuch thing.*

None can tell what ſhall become of us when we die; therefore, *it is folly to live as if we expected a life to come.*

Man hath no more aſſurance of an Heaven than other creatures; therefore, *it is pride only that makes him hope for Heaven.*

All theſe things which Chriſtians hope to enjoy after death are uncertain; therefore, *it is prudence to live as long and as merrily* (that is, looſely and laſciviouſly) *as we can in this world.*

Now, *Sir*, do you not think you have cauſe enough to *clap* your *wings* and *crow* over *us* poor vanquiſhed *Chriſtians*? Who is able to ſtand before all this mighty ſtrength? How can we chuſe but confeſs we have been *fools* all this while, and miſerably bewitched into vain hopes, by the charming voices of a company of crafty *Prieſts*, and fall down and embrace the feet of *you* our deliverers out of this ſlavery? But alas, we muſt yet be *fools* ſtill for all this, ſo *blind* are we that we cannot ſee the *way* that you have made us to eſcape; and what's more than all, we are ſo much *in love* with our preſent *thraldome*, that we prize it above that noble *freedom* which *you* would make us.

In good earneſt, *Sir*, If we be *certain*, as we think we are, of all thoſe things whereof you would make us to *doubt*, I dare ſay you will pronounce *us* in a much better condition than your *ſelves* can ever hope to be, till you become ſuch *fools* as we are:

And if we can have no *certainty* of them as you *ſay*, and I am willing at this time for your ſake to *ſuppoſe*, then both *you* and *we* muſt remain *uncertain* ſtill, and who hath made the *wiſeſt* choice can then only, if you ſay true, be determined, when this life is at an end.

Wit changeth faſhions, almoſt as oft as *cloaths*; and one main *ſtrain* of that *wit* which is now moſt *modiſh*, is with ſhameleſs *impudence*, and in *blunteſt* terms, to *declaim* againſt thoſe things as idle *dreams* and lying *fables*, which all the world hath hitherto received as the moſt undoubted *truths*: Men cannot now ſeem *witty* to themſelves, till they have pronounced all *fools* that were *before* them. To ſay, as much without all *proof*, as *patience* of being contradicted, that the *Prophet is a fool*, and *the Spiritual man is mad*, and none ſo great a *fool* as he who told us ſo long ago, that, *the fool hath ſaid in his heart there is no God*, this is *wit*. I do not envy the men who think it ſo, and uſe it, that great applauſe they hereby gain amongſt ſuch as had rather loſe an *Heaven*, than live *ſoberly*: but I much pity the weakneſs of the men of this age, who rather chuſe to venture their whole *happineſs* in imitation of their *vices*, than provide for their own *ſafety* by exámining their *dictates*.

The *bravery* of ſuch men is to ſet their faces againſt the Heavens, and bid defiance to *him* that made them: and leſt the world become ſo wiſe as to taunt them with the Proverb, —— *None ſo bold as blind Bayard*; they are reſolved to teach it if they can to believe blindly what themſelves cannot believe,

believe, that *there is no God, no Heaven, no Hell, no life after death, no Soul to be ſaved or damned, neither puniſhment nor reward to be expected in a future world.* Now if any man may be ſo unmannerly as to require ſome *proof* of all this, ſome *probable* reaſons at leaſt why he ſhould believe things ſo repugnant to the common opinions of the world; they will *ſwear* it ſtoutly, *ſwagger* it out bravely, call all men *fools*, *talk* all, *hear* nothing, *ſcribble ſomething*, ask *queſtions*, propound ſome *poſſibilities*; and when this is done, and ſome *Satyrical* ſtrains of wit, to cloſe all, laviſhed out on thoſe, who dare *believe* the things which theſe men are moſt *afraid* of; if we will calmly ſtand like tame fools to *their* verdict, we muſt all turn *Atheiſts* and *Epicures*: but if any of *us* poor credulous fools, have yet ſo much courage left us, as not to be *jeared* and *Hector'd*, not to be *ſcar'd* out of all our wits at once with this uncouth noiſe, nor affrighted out of our *old Faith* with ſome dazling *flaſhes* of this new-faſhioned wit, and a *thunder-clap* of oaths in the rear thereof; if we ſhall yet be ſo ſtubborn and impudently refractory as to perſiſt in diſputation, and ſo unreaſonable as once more to call for any farther *ſatisfaction* in a thing ſo *heterodoxly* yet ſo *magiſterially* aſſerted; we ſhall uſually ſee theſe *tall* gentlemen, if they can find no fair opportunity of quitting the company, and running away, begin to *ſtoop* by little and little, even ſo long till the *bravado* dwindle into a bare ---- *It may be ſo*, and yet *poſſibly it may be thus*, and *no man can tell us whether it be thus or ſo*. So that whatever conqueſt they obtain

(if ever they prove maſters of the field) muſt be wholly attributed to the *weakneſs* of their adverſaries, nothing to their own *valour* and *proweſſe*. To deal clearly with you, after all that I have had to this day the opportunity to hear or read from any of theſe *great wits*, who are ſo greedy of the honour to trample upon the *Faith* of *Chriſtians*, yet as impatient, as the *Devil* himſelf would be, though they deſerve it much more, to be called *Atheiſts*; I could never ſee any thing offered as a *concluſion*, which would amount to any more than one of your *Sceptical premiſes*: and were theſe all (with a thouſand more as good as they) laid together with all the *art* and *confidence* whereof you and your partners have good ſtore, how little ſtrength they would have to ſecure you from as much *folly* as you charge upon others, or defend the moſt tolerable of your *deſperate* reſolutions from the juſt imputation of *madneſs*, requires no great skill in another to teach you, nor ſagacity in you to learn (would you be at leiſure from your vanities, and have patience to conſider) without a teacher.

Who *knows* (ſay *you*) whether there be an *Heaven* and a *life to come* or no? Suppoſe now that this your queſtion were altogether unanſwerable, and be it as true as you would have it, that *no man knows* this: Yet are you far from having gain'd all that which you catch at, ſuch a victory over the poor *Chriſtian*, that you may without the juſt cenſure of *vanity* crow upon your beloved dunghill of *uncleanneſs*: For if none know this, then none knows whether you or he hold the *truer*, though it will be eaſily

eaſily ſeen anon which of you holds the *ſafer* opinion. If the *Chriſtian* think there is a *life to come*, and yet there ſhall be *no* ſuch thing, then indeed *he* is in an error, and his hopes are *vain*; and yet I dare not ſay *fooliſh*, becauſe an *eternal happy* life after death is a thing ſo *deſirable* of all, that every man would be willing to lay hold on any *grounds* whereon he might build any though but the *weakeſt* hope and expectation of it. If you think there is *no* life to come, and yet there *be* one, then are you in an *error*, by ſo much the more *dangerous*, by how much your *loſs* will prove greater, *he* loſing only ſome *temporal* joys, but *you eternal*; and yet much more *fooliſh*, inaſmuch as you both *deſpiſed* what confeſſedly was in it ſelf above all things *deſirable*, and *raſhly* expoſed your ſelf to thoſe *torments* which are of all things moſt *formidable*. If then no man yet know whether there ſhall be any ſuch thing or not, then as no man can yet ſay which of you is in the *error*, ſo certainly the *folly* muſt fall to your lot, who make *him* the But of your *ſcorn*, who, for ought that either you, or any man elſe upon your ſuppoſition can yet tell, *may be* as *wiſe*, yea, and *is* probably even in his *choice*, certainly in his *modeſt* behaviour, much *wiſer* than your ſelf. But yet, *good Sir*, if you and your confederates have authority to play the *fools* part, and yet be thought the *wiſeſt* on the Stage, ſhew us whence you have it, and we have done.

Again, you ſay, *Who knows it?* This is your way, you are *ready* at poſing, but as *ſlow* as others in anſwering: and indeed this is your *maſter-piece*, and

and you know whoſe character the *Proverbial* ſaying hath made it, *One fool can ask more queſtions than twenty wiſe men can anſwer.* But ſuppoſe that in anſwer to your queſtion we ſhould affirm that *we know it*, or at leaſt that it *may* be known: what we ſhould thus affirm whether *truly* or no, you could never be able to diſprove: if you ſay and *ſwear* we know it not, that is only to *contradict* not *confute* us; and the world hath ſeen no more for it as yet, but only *your* word and *ours*. If *either* of us as yet have ſo much command over men's Faith, as to be *credited* in a matter of ſo great conſequence, upon our bare *affirmation* or *negation*, then are we yet on *even* ground, and *you* have no more cauſe of triumph over *us*, then *we* have over *you*. If *either* may be credited on his word, why *one* and not *both*? If *both*, much good may it do you: It cannot be in the *contradiction*, but with reſpect to the *divided* parties: We ſay, *we know it*, and are believed; you ſay, *you know it not*, and are believed. Say we both *true*? then are *we* knowing and *you* ignorant. Say we both *falſly*? then are *you* alike guilty with *us* in couſening the world by a *lie*: and *your* lie is the more *pernicious*, by how much greater the *good* is out of which you couſen it. Say *we truly*, and *you falſly*? I need not tell you what follows: But if *we* ſay *falſly* and *you truly*, you have only this advantage, that you are *ignorant*, and we are *deceived*: both equally to be *pitied* by others, but neither have cauſe of *glorying* over the other. Yet without doubt, *you* muſt be the *only* men who have ſearched into *Nature's* myſteries, and have been

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fitted by the advantages of Education to diſcover the knaveries of *jugling Prieſts*, and the follies of a *deluded* people: If your *word* may be taken for it, thus you ſhall be eſteemed: but if your great *boaſtings* of your ſelves, will amount to no more but a piece of *arrogance* too well known to be eſſential to men of *your* complexion, *you* muſt ſtill go a begging as well as *we* fools for Faith to believe you.

Suppoſe it yet once more to be as you ſay, that *no* man knows any thing of all this, yet as this will afford *you* no ground of glorying over *others* ſimplicity; ſo neither will the unreaſonable *inferences* you fetch thence, when throughly examined, prove either *acceptable* to the *conſidering* part of the world, or ſo much as *ſafe* or *honourable* to your ſelves: I ſhall ſhew you the *former* of theſe *now*, and the *later* in the *cloſe* of this *Letter*.

You tell us, that ſeeing theſe things cannot be known, *It is moſt reaſonable that men ſhould pleaſe themſelves in a free enjoyment of all things they eſteem good in this world, and ſo make to themſelves as much happineſs as they can here, ſeeing that happineſs which men expect after death in another world is, for ought we know, no better than a dream.* I dare not doubt, but whileſt you talk at this rate, you think you ſay *that* for which the world is bound to return you many *thanks*, and our *Churches* will now be ſoon emptied to fill the *Tavern* and the *Alehouſe*, and the jugling *Prieſts* be forced either to *ſtarve*, or *ſtand* to your *courteſie* whether they ſhall be entertain'd at your doors with a hard *cruſt* or a harder *cudgel*. But be not angry, *I beſeech you*, if I be bold to tell you,

you, that if *theſe* be your thoughts, you flatter your ſelf too much, and may poſſibly ſtay as long for *thanks* from men that can *conſider* what they do, as you would make the poor *Prieſts* you ſo freely abuſe, ſtand for an *alms* at *your* gates.

They who rightly underſtand the *meaning* of your words, and have ſo much *wit* as to think on any thing *beyond* their preſent luſts, would hardly be perſwaded to think any thing, ſave that *Hell* which you *deny* more *dreadful*, than that *other* Hell which this your wild inference, if once generally aſſented to, would make upon *Earth*. Nay, I dare ſay, that could you win all men to be of the ſame mind, of which you at preſent ſeem to be, *your ſelf* would be the *firſt* that would begin to *contradict* your ſelf, and be ready to cut your *own* throat, to be revenged on your *raſhneſs* in teaching men this *mad* leſſon. Suppoſe that every *Prince* ſhould bring his *Subjects*, every *Lord* his *Tenants*, every *Father* his *Children*, and every *Maſter* his *Servants*, *firſt* to be of this *opinion*, that nothing remains either to be *feared* or *hoped* for after *death*; and that they ſhould *next* from this opinion take up the ſame *reſolution*, to *live* as they *liſt*, and enjoy their *pleaſure* without all *check* of conſcience: I am very confident, that if the *Subjects* ſhould take *arms* to redeem their *liberty*, the *Tenant* keep *back* his *rent*, and not *own* his *Landlord*, *Children* deny *obedience* to their *Parents*, and *Servants* refuſe to *labour* for their *Maſters*, thoſe very *ſame* perſons who firſt unadviſedly put this dangerous *fancy* into their heads, would rather work all means to have thoſe

thoſe *heads* taken off from their ſhoulders, than it ſhould continue any longer *there*. How *unreaſonable* a thing is it then in *you*, to triumph in *deriſion* over the *Faith* of *Chriſtians*, which you cannot but confeſs is the *main* buttreſs that upholds your own beſt beloved *intereſts*: when, ſhould this your *darling* humour, on which you now moſt *blindly* dote, as much bewitch your *inferiors*, as it hath done your *ſelves*, it would at *once* make havock of your *eſtates* and *honours*, and force you to do penance for your follies in *ſackcloth* and *aſhes*?

Can you yet hug your ſelves in your *licentious* thoughts, and dream that *wiſe* men will *admire* and magnifie your *wit*? Though moſt men do indeed expreſs too great a *fondneſs* for their *liberty*, yet I dare ſay a very *few* would be content to enjoy it upon thoſe *terms* as you do promiſe it. Moſt men do dread the effects of *libertiniſm* and *licentiouſneſs*, no leſs than they love the *cauſes* that produce them before they underſtand the *evils* they are pregnant with; and therefore although too many *ears* be already ſet too wide open to your *Syren* notes, yet is it a thing incredible, that they ſhould be ſo unwiſe, when their *eyes* are opened too to ſee the *rocks* and *whirlpools* into the midſt of which this raviſhing muſick would invite them, as wilfully to run upon their own deſtruction. Would it not, think you, be a very *pleaſing* thing for men to live in perpetual *feuds*, *tumults* and *confuſions*? What a gallant incouragement would it be to the poor husbandman, when he durſt not go to *plough* without his *guard*, leſt the next that comes ſhould take away his oxen;

nor could caſt the *ſeed* into the furrows, without very reaſonable fears, that another ſhould reap the *crop:* when he builds an *houſe* to think that his next neighbour will ſet it on fire, or thruſt him out of his poſſeſſion: and when he is laid down to *reſt*, not to dare to ſhut his eyes, leſt his *wife* or *child* ſhould cut his throat? If all the fears of *Hell* and *endleſs* torments, which *Religion* poſſeſſeth men withall, are found *weak* enough to keep them within the bounds of *honeſty* and *good-neighbourhood*; then I muſt be bold to tell you Sir, and all wiſe men will eaſily believe me, that the reins of *religion* once *cut* in pieces by your *Sophiſtry*, and nothing after *this* life left for men to *fear* or *long* for; all the *laws* of man will be as eaſily broken, as *Sampſon*'s Withs; the *Magiſtrates* authority will be ſet at nought, and the greateſt power you can imagine in the *civil ſword* will prove too weak to ſecure the publick *peace*; or reſtrain the *libertine* from thoſe *outrages* and *extravagances*, which would render *death* a thouſand times more eligible than *life*. This is a thing too apparently the conſequence of your doctrine: for who are the men, I pray you, that dare deſpiſe the *gibbet* and the *halter* for any *petty* prey, but thoſe whom you have *taught*, or elſe have been *before-hand* with you, in believing, that as well their *miſery* as their *happineſs* ſhall end *there?* But *your ſelves* know very well the truth of what I now ſay, and are too ready to make ill uſe of it, to our preſent *diſturbance* and your own future *miſery*. You can tell us when you liſt, that *Religion* hath the greateſt power to keep the World in

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awe and *order*; but then you would perſwade us to believe withall, that it is no more but a *politick invention*, which *neceſſity* ſet the wit of man on work to find out for that purpoſe: I am not now to diſprove any of your aſſertions, being reſolved to repreſent you to your own eyes with all the *advantages* you can deſire; you will find, when you can but once allow your ſelves the *liberty* to *conſider* things, that you ſtand in need of *more* than *all*, to win you the approbation even of your own judgments. For ſuppoſing this, that you would have; are not *you* the only *politick* wiſe men of the world, and do not *we* all owe you abundant thanks, for thus opening a wide gap to all *confuſion* and *diſorder*, and your own *ruine* amongſt the reſt of mankind; whileſt you endeavour to pull down that *fence* which you confeſs was *wiſely* made, and not without *great* cauſe, to ſecure the *peace* and *comfort* of the world?

If all this be not yet enough to let you ſee how much you *befool* your ſelves whileſt you *deride* our *Faith*, and call your ſelves *wiſe* for living as you *liſt*: conſider but this *one* thing more; how you muſt needs hereby deprive your ſelves of that *only* thing, beſides your *wit*, wherein you ſeem to *glory*; I mean, the *honour* of being *Loyal* to your *Prince*: It is moſt evident, that you thus betray your ſelves to be the *worſt* of ſubjects, and the moſt *dangerous* of all that plead for Toleration in a *State* or *Kingdom*. I confeſs indeed, there is a *ſort* of people that would be thought the only men to whom the name of *Saints* is due, and, under a pretence of *zeal* and

conſcience, have made bold to *murder Kings* and *fire Kingdoms*: And poſſibly I ſhall not much miſtake, if I ſay, that the world is beholden to the notorious *hypocriſie* of theſe *zelots*, for very much of that *Atheiſm* under which it now groans. *Men*, apt to *conſider* ſo little as *you* are, and not *able* or elſe *unwilling* to ſee their own *faces* in theſe men, hid under *masks*, on which *ſomething* is drawn reſembling *ours*; are ready enough to conclude that we ſhall not dare to *diſown* them; and that all who have a *real zeal* for the *Chriſtian Faith*, are either as *blind* or *hypocritical* as *they*. But, *good Sir*, I beſeech you, know, that we are bold enough to pronounce both *them* and *you* to be dangerous *enemies* no leſs to *State* than *Church*: as their *zeal* is only a *diſguiſe* and *trick*, to paſs on *undiſcovered* to their deſigned *villanies*; ſo your *open defiance* to all *religion*, and profeſſion to ſeek your own *pleaſure* in all things, makes us *more* than ſuſpect, that your *intereſt* or *luſt* ſhall at any time take *place* with you, before your *King* or *Countrey*. What confidence can your *Prince* have of your *Loyalty*, farther than he ſhall be pleaſed to *tolerate* your *vanities*, or you pleaſe to do him the *favour*, to call him *Soveraign*? Whatever *obedience* you yield unto him, he muſt thank you for it as a *courteſie*, but muſt not claim it as a *duty*. It is clear as the noon-day's Sun, that ſo long as you fear nothing in *another* world, and thereupon reſolve to gratifie your humour whileſt you live in *this*, you need not run to the *Pope*'s univerſal power, nor the *Sectarie*'s blind zeal; for a *diſpenſation* to turn *rebel*; your own *pleaſure*, or your

your *profit*, or any thing elſe you can eſteem a part of your earthly *happineſs*, or which can court your *humour*, can make all *diſpenſations* to do miſchief *needleſs*.

Yet ſtill are you *angry*, becauſe we will not call our ſelves *fools* for believing that our *Souls* are *ſomething*, and that they ſhall not *vaniſh* into *aire*, or *nothing* when we *die*: and why? becauſe *forſooth* we cannot *know* it, and all is ſtill no more but *Faith*. 'Tis true the things we do *believe*, are things *unſeen*, neither can *ſenſe* or common *reaſon* aſſure us of the truth of thoſe things which we believe ſhall be *hereafter*. And yet it is no leſs true, that *neither* of theſe can enable *you* to prove our *Faith* abſurd. Nay, were you but half ſo much the *maſters* of *reaſon* as you would have us think, that very *reaſon* would aſſure you that our *Faith* is *reaſonable*, and your *opinions fanciful*: and that we have much *more* cauſe to *pity* your *folly*, whileſt we can truly ſay your *wicked* and *dangerous* courſes are all built upon an *unreaſonable fancy*; than you can have to *laugh* at us, becauſe our *honeſt* and *conſcientious* lives are grounded, as you ſuppoſe, upon an *uncertain Faith*.

For let our *Faith* be *certain* or *uncertain*, you muſt needs confeſs it very *ſerviceable* to the world: it doth much *good*, and *hurt* it can do *none*. But your *opinions* be they *true* or *falſe*, are ſo far from any poſſibility of producing the leaſt *good* effect, that they cannot chuſe but be the parents of innumerable *miſchiefs*. Some of you indeed have been ſo raſh as to affirm, That *religion* hath been the

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cauſe of all the *Wars* which have diſturbed the world: with ſo *impotent* an eagerneſs of mind are you wont to *declaim* againſt what you do not *love*, that you can regard neither *truth* nor *modeſty* in thoſe *affected* heats. I will again confeſs unto you, that *ſome* religions have been the cauſe of many *wars*, but the true *Chriſtian* religion of *none*: and though it be moſt true that even the *Chriſtian Faith* hath been the *ſubject* of very hot diſputes, lamentable diviſions, and moſt bloudy wars; yet he that ſhall call it the *cauſe* of any of theſe, ſhall only thereby bewray his *malice* or his *ignorance*, in imputing *that* to the *Chriſtian Faith*, which is imputable only either to the *hatred* of its *enemies*, or the *errors*, *imperfections* and *hypocriſies* of its *profeſſors*; and always either to the *want* or too *weak meaſure* of it. He that reads the *Hiſtories* of all ages, he that hath any inſight into the *Cabals* and *myſteries* of States, he that underſtands the *rules* that *Chriſt* hath left us, cannot chuſe but ſee that moſt of theſe evils do clearly ſpring from the *ambition*, *diſcontent* and *wantonneſs* of men not truly *Chriſtian*: that punctilio's of *honour*, *priviledge* and worldly *intereſt* kindle thoſe *fires* which conſume our *peace* and *quiet*: yea, he that is half blind may ſee that thoſe very *wars* which have been managed with a *pretence* to *Chriſtian Zeal*, have come from the *ſame* forementioned fountains; and that *religion* hath only been made a *cloak* ſhamefully *abuſed* to cover moſt *irreligious* deſigns and actions. For if the *Faith* we profeſs bind us to nothing more than *peace* and *love*; and ſo ſeverely prohibit all *ſelf-ſeeking*, *malice* and *revenge*,

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that it commands us upon penalty of *loſing* all we *hope* for, and *ſuffering* all we can *fear* in another world, to *deny our ſelves*, and *love our enemies*, and *bear the croſs* with patience, to return *bleſſing* for *curſing*, and *good* for *evil*; who ſees not, that the world is made miſerable not by the multitude of thoſe who *ſincerely* profeſs the *Chriſtian Faith*, but becauſe ſo *few* do yet *imbrace* it, and ſo *many* of thoſe who in *ſhew* only and for ſome *ſecular* advantage make profeſſion of it, are *indeed* and *truth* ſuch as *you* are. Shew me a *rebel*, ſhew me an *oppreſſor*, ſhew me a factious and ſeditious *zelot*, in a word, ſhew me the man that *wittingly* and *willingly* offers the leaſt *injury* to his *neighbour*; let him *preach* and *pray*, yea, let him wear, for faſhions ſake, all the *faces* and *formalities* of *religion*; I will be bold to return him to *you* again, for none of *ours*, and prove to *his* face and *yours*, that *he* had never any more to do, than *you* have, with the *Chriſtian Faith*, that is, to *diſhonour* and *blaſpheme* it, and *give occaſion* to unconſidering men to talk unreaſonably of things they *will* not underſtand.

But yet our *folly*, ſay you, is moſt apparent, for we pretend unto a *certainty* of *Faith*, which you think, it is *impoſſible* for any man to have: But ſtay Sir, our *folly* is not yet ſo *evident* as you would have it. Such a *certainty* of *Faith* your ſelves I doubt not will be ready enough to grant in ſome caſes, as may make it very reaſonable for you to *acquieſce* therein, and not interrupt the *ſatisfaction* which you thence receive by any farther *diſputation* or *doubt*. Should any of us be ſo unmannerly as to call

call you *fool*, becauſe you do *believe* you are no *baſtard*, nay, becauſe you do not doubt but you were born of a *woman*; and give you this *reaſon* for it, that you reſt content with a *certainty* of *Faith*, which none can have; would you not be angry? I have ſometime heard a man of your *own* temper, when he was in his *gibing* mood, and had a mind to recreate himſelf and his companions with ſuch wild *friskings* of his playſome *wit*, call all men *fools* that durſt ſay they *knew* there is any ſuch thing as that we call a *world*: thus when *wit* begins to *rave* it knows not when to make an end: and that *you* may ſeem *wiſe*, not only the *Chriſtian*, but *all* men whatſoever muſt be content, ſometimes at leaſt, to be thought *fools*; and the *certainty* of *ſenſe* no more regarded than *that* of *Faith*: but when this Gentleman was asked, whether he *knew* he had an *eſtate* in this world, and if he did not *believe* that man ſhould do him wrong, that ſhould thruſt him out of his poſſeſſion; or pretend a right to ſhare with him in his *inheritance*? he came a little to himſelf, and was content to be a *fool* for company; he *ſwore* it ſtoutly that he would not ſo *tamely* part with his *eſtate* here, as we *Chriſtians* in ſome caſes are willing to do, and that he would ſend any ſuch bold intruder to ſeek a portion in that *other* world which *we* expect: Yet was this Gentleman more beholden to the *certainty* of *Faith* than *Senſe* for the knowledge of his *right*; *ſenſe* could only inform him that a Houſe and Land, *&c.* was there *viſible*, and now in his *poſſeſſion*; but *other* evidences creating *Faith*, were the *only* things could make him a ſatisfactory

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aſſurance of his *rightful* title to them. It is ſo clear that a man may have ſo great an *aſſurance* of *Faith* as may free him from *doubting*, and beget a chearful *acquieſcence* and *confidence*; that we have no *other aſſurance* of any thing done before we were brought forth, or in thoſe parts of the world which we never ſaw: whereof yet we conclude our ſelves ſo *certain*, that we would hiſs at the man that ſhould *deny* them. It is not therefore yet *apparent* that we are *fools*, becauſe we pretend to a *certainty* of *Faith*; or if it *be*, we ſhall be ſure to find company amongſt *you*.

We will yet grant you this your deſired *advantage* alſo; ſuppoſe we then, that no ſuch *certainty* as we pretend to, can be had: but ſuppoſe withall that your *opinion* have as little of *probability*, as our *Faith* hath of *certainty*; the advantage is not yet ſo great, but that if *we* muſt be thought fooliſhly *credulous*, *you* muſt alſo be eſteem'd as fooliſhly *opinionative*. When you have ſet your wits on tenters, to prove the things that we believe to have *no* being, you are ſtill fain to come off with a mere *poſſibility*, that they *may* not be. We will not be ſo unreaſonable as you are, to demand of *you* as you ridiculouſly do of *us*, any thing like Mathematical *demonſtrations* for your opinion of *no* God, *no* Soul, *no* future life, and the like; but we think it reaſonable that you ſhould ſhew us ſome at leaſt *probable* reaſons for your opinion, if you will have it paſs for an *opinion*, that is, for ſomething *rational*, and not rather for a mere *dotage*: and yet ſuch reaſons ſhew you none, nor ever can do: your *opinion*

is therefore *groundleſs* and *vain*. Now on the other hand, we upon all occaſions produce our *motives* of *credibility*, and ſuch *grounds* of *believing*, as all men able to exerciſe their reaſon, do account ſufficient, to build a *Faith* upon, becauſe all that matters of this nature are *capable* of: and he that demands *more*, only declares *his ignorance*, and is as abſurd as he that will not own there be any *colours* becauſe he *hears* them not, or *ſounds*, becauſe he *ſees* them not. Yet do we offer you more than you can juſtly demand; for what we have *reaſon* enough upon the true *motives* of credibility only, to *believe*, we have undeniably ſo much aſſiſtance both from *ſenſe* and *reaſon*, as to render them highly *probable*, even in the judgment of the *conſidering unbeliever*. Now if it be thus, as you will certainly find, when you ſhall have patience to peruſe ſeriouſly the many things which are written to this purpoſe; then certainly is the folly yet *yours*, who out of a *vain* and *groundleſs opinion*, of the truth whereof you can give no *probable* account, go on to deride our *Faith* of things, both *credible* and *probable*; and on no other account but this, that ſtill you ſuppoſe it *poſſible* that we may be *deceived*.

Yea, but *this* is our *folly*, that we *believe* things *incredible*: and ſo you ſay we do; becauſe we do believe ſuch things to *be*, as far exceed the *comprehenſion* of any mans underſtanding: when you have ſaid *this*, you have ſaid *all*; and we muſt either *now* be fools or *never*. But ſay, I pray', Is it a thing ſo *incredible*, that there ſhould be *ſomething* that we poor mortals are not able by our reaſon to

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comprehend? You ſay, indeed it is only *pride* which makes men *hope* for *Heaven*; the vanity of which expreſſion it were as *eaſie* for *me* to ſhew, as *you* would find it *hard* to prove, that it is only *pride* which makes men *humble*: but I am not now to diſprove your bold ſayings, but reprove your unreaſonable arrogance: I ſhall only therefore return you this, which I think no man will ſay ſtands in need of a proof; that it is *pride* alone can make *men* think, that what their reaſon doth not *comprehend*, is *not*. I ſhall need to do no more, but wiſh you ſeriouſly to adviſe with your own *Philoſophy*, to diſcover this piece of your folly to you. There you will eaſily learn, without my help, that *incomprehenſibility* by our *ſenſe* and *reaſon*, is ſo far from making any colourable proof that the thing to which it is ſuppoſed to belong is *not*; that even the *minuteſt* things conſiderable in nature have depths unſearchable by either. Nay, it hath been often ſhewn you (and let me now beg this favour of you, when you next take our *books* into your hands, not to reſolve before-hand to *laugh* at what ſhould make you *wiſe* and *modeſt*) that whileſt you are ſtudying how to charge our Faith with foul *abſurdities*; you plunge your ſelves, ſometimes into the very *ſame*, and oft into *thoſe* which confeſſedly on all hands are much *fouler*. I ſhall therefore leave with you this reaſonable requeſt, that you will only ſo long *forbear* to cenſure our *Faith* as *abſurd*, till you can free your ſelves from thoſe *abſurdities* which you are forced inevitably to run into by *contradicting* it.

All that I have hitherto ſaid, tends only to perſwade you, to be ſo *juſt* to *mankind*, as to think it poſſible *ſome* of them may be *wiſer* and *know* more than *your ſelves*: or if this will not down with your proud ſtomachs, to imagine, (at leaſt for a time) that you may poſſibly be as *fooliſh* as the *wiſeſt* of thoſe who are *not* of *your* opinion; till you have weighed well what they can plead for themſelves. If we *all* erre, *pity* the *frailty* of our common *humanity*, and deride *us* not for thoſe *infirmities* which are incident, or may be, to *your ſelves*. Give us leave whileſt we *erre* both ſo *innocently* and ſo *beneficially* to *you*, to *erre* alſo *peaceably*. If there be *no life* after *this* to be expected; yet give *us* leave at leaſt to make to our ſelves the ſame benefit of *this* now preſent, as *you* deſire to do: *that is*, to *pleaſe* our ſelves as much in the comfort of our innocent *hopes*, as you *delight* your ſelves in your wicked *enjoyments*. Certainly, when you conſider it well, *our error* (if it be one) will appear to be *your* no inconſiderable *advantage*; that *Faith* of ours which you make your *ſport*, makes you a quiet and peaceable *fruition* of your deſires. 'Tis *this* that keeps us from *envying* your *honours*, from *breaking in* upon your *incloſures*, from *diſturbing* your *pleaſures* any *other* way, *than* by our charitable *admonitions*; wherein our deſign is, not to *abridge* you in any part of *this* worlds *happineſs*, but to *invite* you to ſhare with us (if it be poſſible) in the *glories* of the *next*. If I miſtake not now; howſoever *ignorant* and *fooliſh we* may ſeem to be for our *ſelves*; yet this *our folly*, on this one account, that it ſeeks

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your good no leſs than *our own*, deſerves your *thanks*, not your *cenſure* and *deriſion*; our preſent *madneſs* more befriending you than your own *wiſdom*; and ſurely our good *wiſhes* for your *future* happineſs, can do you as little *hurt*, as you imagine our *hopes* can do *good* unto our ſelves.

You have already, in part, ſeen how much you are your own *enemies*, in *abuſing* your *well-wiſhers*; and yet how much more diſadvantagious to your ſelves, are both your *opinions* and your *practices*; how little either of *honour* or real *ſatisfaction* you ſhall ever be able to reap from them, if *true*; and what horrid *miſeries* they will certainly bring upon you, if *falſe*; I am now to tell you.

Doth it become a *Philoſopher*, ſo great a *maſter* of *reaſon* as you are, to profeſs a *willingneſs* to ſit down and take up your *reſt* in the midſt of your *doubts*; and ſettle in your ſelf a firm *reſolution* of adhering to *that* opinion which is ſo *generally* exploded, without any farther *ſearch* or *examination*? Were the *matters*, of which we now ſpeak, *trivial* and *light*; ſuch as thoſe unprofitable *niceties*, which are the ſole buſineſs of too many curious *wits*; and which, be they *true* or *falſe*, *known* or *unknown*, are of *equal* concernment, that is, of *none* at all to mankind; I ſhould not blame but commend your *indifferency*: but then the vain *curioſity* and indefatigable *pains* of theſe men in their inquiſition into mere *trifles* and things of *little* or *no* uſe, doth condemn your *ſloth* and *negligence* in ſearching no farther into *theſe* things, which you muſt needs grant to be of *univerſal* and *eternal* concernment.

This.

This then is all the *honour* that you are like to gain hereby; that the conſidering world looks upon *you*, not as upon great *wits*; but rather as on a company of poor *baffled* fools; men of *low*, *ſoft* and *effeminate* ſpirits; who, rather than indure to be at any more *pains*, have choſen to ſit down and *languiſh* in perpetual *deſpair*.

Theſe, Sir, are the *honourable* thoughts which *wiſe* men have of you; and now ſee if you can recompence this loſs of reputation, by any real *ſatisfaction* you can find to your ſelves in this your deſperate courſe. You know not, *you ſay*, what *ſhall be* hereafter, and yet your *choice* is to live *wickedly* now. What interpretation can this admit of; but that you are reſolved to do violence to your *reaſon*, and ſtrive with the variety of your vanities to confound your *conſciences*, and ſtifle your *fears*? This is right *childrens* play; you ſhut your eyes, leſt you ſhould *ſee* what you are *afraid* of; and would perſwade your ſelves that ſo long as *you* ſee *no body*, *no body* ſees *you*. As *they*, when they are terrified by their nurſes with ſtories of *Spirits*, wrap themſelves over head and ears in their bed-clothes, and then fancy themſelves ſafe enough: or as I have heard of ſome condemned malefactors, who drank themſelves *drunk* when they went toward the gallows, that they might not be *ſenſible* of their ſufferings; thus wiſely do you *ſooth* your ſelves up in your ungrounded conceits, and *ſwill* your ſelves in all carnal jollities, to free your ſelves from the *terrors* of a future *Hell*.

Give me leave to plead with you a little: You confeſs

confeſs you do not certainly *know*, that there is *no Heaven, no Hell, no future life of retribution.* If you do not *certainly know* that theſe things are *not*, then muſt you needs admit of ſome *doubts*, whether they *be* or *no*; and grant that, for ought you *know* to the contrary, they *may be.* Now doth not *common reaſon* inſtruct all men in matters *doubtful*, and yet very *weighty*, to be *cautious*, to ſtudy their own *ſafety* all they can, and to make choice of *that* wherein appeareth *leaſt* of *danger? Fears* and *doubts* may indeed make ſome fools *deſperate*, but they always make wiſe men *wary*; and he that knows not what will be, will yet in common prudence, *firſt* diligently uſe all means of *informing* himſelf, and where he cannot *remove* his *ignorance*, he will wiſely labour to *improve* his *doubts* into a provident *foreca ſt* againſt all *evils* which he can imagine *poſſible.* Where the event is *dubious*, it ill becomes a *wiſe* man to *ruſh* forward at all adventures, or reſolutely to *pitch* upon that courſe which (if there be a *better* and a *worſe*) will undoubtedly lead him into that he hath moſt cauſe to *fear.* Where then, *I beſeech you*, is that great *wiſdom* you boaſt of? For if it ſhall ſo fall out, that theſe things at length appear to be as the *Chriſtian* believes, and *you* know nothing to the contrary, but *ſo* they *ſhall* be; then muſt you needs confeſs you have fooliſhly *choſen* your own *deſtruction*; and *he* whom you now call *fool*, will be found at laſt the only *wiſe* and *happy* man. How, think you, will you then *curſe* your own *folly*, and wiſh ten thouſand times to no purpoſe, you had been ſo *wiſe* in time as *to conſider your*

latter.

latter end; and that you had embraced this warning, which now I give you, to provide againſt that *evil day*, which as yet you ſuppoſe only *poſſible?* But if it ſo fall out, that *we* at length appear to be *deceived*, and *none* of theſe things follow which we expect; when the *end* ſhall come, we are aſſured, that *our* condition can be no *worſe* than *your's*. If after *death* be *nothing*, and *death* it ſelf (be it what it will be) be common to us *all*, and make no difference of perſons; if *we* that *believe*, and *you* that *believe not*, muſt die *alike*, and rot to dirt like *beaſts that periſh*; then, as *you* ſhall neither feel the *loſs* of your pleaſures *paſt*, nor retain any longer *reliſh* of them: ſo, neither ſhall *we* be ſenſible of the *fruſtration* of our *hopes*, nor be troubled with *remorſe* for our paſt *follies* and *ſufferings*: where all *ſenſe* ceaſes, neither *joy* nor *ſorrow* can find place.

Yet ſtill, *ſay you*, why ſhould we ſo patiently diſmiſs the *comforts* of this *preſent* life, which is all we can be *ſure* of, in *uncertain* hopes of thoſe *future* good things, whereof we have no *aſſurance*?

Here indeed you point out unto us the very ſource and ſpring of all your Atheiſm: for, were your hearts laid open, I doubt not, but we ſhould ſoon find, that it was not any *ſtrength* of *reaſon* that prevailed upon you to diſlike our *Faith*; but that *oppoſition* which it now makes againſt your *darling luſts*. 'Tis only your *unwillingneſs* to forſake the preſent *ſweets* of *ſin*, that makes you ſet ſo light by the future *joys* of *Heaven*. Theſe have gain'd ſo complete a *conqueſt* over your *affections*, that they will

will not afford you leave to *think* upon ought *elſe*. And becauſe you now and then, whether you will or no, feel your ſelves *ſurprized*, and your *pleaſures* interrupted, by the ſtealing in of ſome or other of thoſe *unwelcome* thoughts, which you ſtrive all you can to keep out; you ſet your wits on work to ſtudy all the *arts* of ſtupifying *conſcience*, and blinding *reaſon*, that it may not ſee ſo *far* off, as *Heaven* or *Hell*.

That *ſelf-denial*, that height of *temperance* and *ſobriety*, that chearful bearing of the *Croſs*, and conſtant *diligence* and *unweariedneſs* in *holy duties*, that *unconcernedneſs* for the *world*, and patient *ſuffering* of all *evil*, which *Chriſt* calls for in all his followers, and which we *Chriſtians* believe the direct *way* to eternal *happineſs*, are the great *bug-bears* that *affright* your poor *daſtardly* and *childiſh* Souls from that *Faith*, we glory in. You can now behold nothing in *Chriſtianity* but *grim* and *griſly* faces, *melancholy* and *dejected* countenances; and we *Chriſtians* appear in your eyes as ſo many *walking things* in *Church-yards*, and who can expect you *towards* ſhould dare to come *near* us?

Where, all this while, are thoſe *brave ſpirits*, that *noble courage* and *greatneſs of Soul*, you are wont to boaſt of? Have we deſpiſed *Chriſtians* rob'd you of them all? Or meant you rather *no more* by all your *brags*, but only to *ſet off* that *fool-hardineſs* and deſperate height of all *madneſs*, in daring ſo boldly to venture on the *fouleſt* vices, to rank your ſelves with *Beaſts* and *Devils*, and now and then to ſhed a little of your rank *bloud* in a *duel*, to adde a

ſarther *grace* yet to the *borrowed* beauties of thoſe whoriſh faces which you ſo much Idolize? How would an *old Heathen*, were he now alive, laugh you out of this *new Philoſophy*, and that goodly title of *Virtuoſi*, which you ſhamefully abuſe to commend your *follies* to the world.

I am a little *angry*, I confeſs, when I call to mind your abominable *wickedneſs*; but yet, I will aſſure you, no *pity* is wanting in me to your *perſons*, nor *charity* to lend you what aſſiſtance I am able to help you out of thoſe foul *ditches* into which your wretched *miſtakes* have thrown you.

Know then, I beſeech you, that though the *ſeverites* of a *Chriſtian* life were a thouſand times *more* than indeed they are, yet are they juſt *nothing*, when compared with thoſe *comforts*, which that *hope* you deride, doth abundantly adminiſter unto us. Experience ſhews us, how that many real and very great *difficulties*, which men *unaccuſtomed* to ſuch encounters, or not *animated* with the like *deſires* and *hopes*, are apt to look upon as *inſuperable*, and eſteem him *mad* that would expoſe himſelf unto them; ſeem yet *eaſie* unto thoſe men, whoſe eyes and *affections* are all the while they ſtruggle *through* them, fixed upon ſome thing *beyond* them, which they *prize* above all things, and have conceived ſome hope of attaining to, even though their *aſſurance* of *ſucceſs* be as little as you now ſuppoſe ours to be. It is no news to hear of a *Merchant*, whoſe either love to *wealth*, or more *honeſt* deſires of ſupplying his *countreys needs*, makes him *freely* venture his *life* and *livelihood* at once in a weak Veſſel to the

the *mercileſs* winds and waves, all in hope of an *uncertain* booty: and not to trouble you with more *inſtances* in a matter ſo obvious to the eyes of all men; *you* know, how *ſome* amongſt your *ſelves*, in the courtſhip of an *uncertain* honour, or what's *worſe*, a proud *unconſtant* woman, wade with much fooliſh *patience* through thoſe *ſlaviſh* and *debaſing* drudgeries, which are no leſs deſtructive to your *reputation*, than repugnant to your *humours*; 'tis viſible enough, that for the *uncertain hope* of enjoying your beloved vanities, you are willing to want your preſent *eaſe* and *quiet*; and ſo far to deny your ſelves, as to make it a *courteſie* in him that will call you *men*. Shall it now be thought a *reaſonable* thing in you thus *poorly* to degrade your ſelves, through *ambition*, *avarice* and *luxury*: and muſt it be eſteem'd a *folly* in men, whoſe aims are no lower than *Heaven* and *Eternal* glory, with a chearful *valour* to encounter a few more *tolerable* hardſhips; which are ſo far from having any thing of *baſeneſs* in them, that they have ever been juſtly accounted (even by men of *meaner* hopes the moſt renowned *Heathen*) the beſt *trials* and *exerciſes* of *brave* and *generous* ſpirits?

For tell me, what are thoſe *dreadful* things unto which the *Chriſtian's* love of *God* and *Heaven* doth expoſe him? Have not ſome old *Heathens*, who have thereby won unto themſelves the Epithets of *gallant*, *great* and *vertuous*, even for a *name* writ upon a *ſtone* in *golden* letters, moſt chearfully undergone the *ſame*? Are not there *books*, yet in the hands of every School-boy, full of grave leſſons of

juſtice, *temperance*, *ſobriety* and *patience*, and ſuch other *vertues* as we are bound to *practice*, and they thought to be the only things fit to keep *men* up above the rank of *bruits*? Have not they taught us, that *contempt* of *pleaſures*, and all the *fading glories* of the world, is the *mark* of a *brave* Soul? That *poverty*, and *baniſhment*, and *death* it ſelf are *nothing* unto a truly *noble* ſpirit, whoſe *character* it is, to love *vertue* for it *ſelf*, and admire it *moſt*, when *ſtript* of all thoſe *outward* ornaments, which commend it only unto *thoſe* that know not how to judge of things by their own native worth? Have not many of them left us *examples* of ſacrificing our *eaſe* and *life* to the common *good* and *honour* of our *Country*? Shall we *admire* and *praiſe* theſe things when we read them from the *pens*, and ſee them in the *lives* and *deaths* of ſober *Heathens*, and yet *condemn* them as *abſurd* when commended to us by the *Faith* of *Chriſtians*?

And yet, alas, all theſe things which ſo affright and trouble you, are far from being *ſuch* as you imagine. Had you but the *courage* once to *taſte* the *ſweetneſs* of a *Chriſtian's* life, you would preſently confeſs your paſt *fears* as *cauſeleſs*, as now your *cenſures* are *unreaſonable*, in *condemning* before all *trial*. This is that great *injuſtice* which we *Chriſtians* are wont to meet with at *your* hands; you are wedded to your *luſts*, and your *ſins* have *bribed* you, and before a full *hearing*, you paſs *ſentence*, and *condemn* the things you moſt *unreaſonably hate*, becauſe you do not *know* them, nor will have *patience* to *examine* and *try* them.

We

We do not, by our *Faith*, abridge our ſelves in any *honeſt* comfort or delight: our *ſelf-denial*, when rightly underſtood, will appear to be the only true *ſelf-love*. We *abſtain* from that only which we think will do us *hurt*, and if we ſeem to part too freely with any thing is *good*, 'tis only when we are perſwaded that the *keeping it* would prove our *loſs*, by hindring us from the enjoyment of a *better*. We think it prudence to take heed that we *ſurfeit* not on what is *ſweeteſt*; and that we be not *poiſon'd* whileſt we too freely indulge our *palates*. We are not taught to caſt our *goods* into the *Sea*, ſave when ſo to do appears the only way to ſave our *ſelves* from being *drowned*. Our *ſelf-denial* then is not that *moroſe* thing you fancy it to be, but as *ſweet* to *us*, as *you* can think it *bitter*: whileſt our *meaneſt* fortunes are *ſweetned* unto us with the *pleaſures* of a *contented mind*; and the greateſt *loſs* that can now befall us, can never fall *heavy* on us, who live in continual expectation of a future *recompence*, and have learn'd to *value* things according to their *worth*.

In ſhort, Sir, we are allowed whatſoever is *agreeable* to our *nature*, and moſt conducing to a *healthful* and a *comfortable* life. We have never been inſtructed to expoſe our ſelves to *unneceſſary* evils or ſufferings, but with all *honeſt* and *honourable* caution, to prevent them: and when the *Croſs* is laid in our way, not to baulk it through *fear* and *cowardice*, neither to ſtep aſide into the paths of *wickedneſs* to avoid it; but *manfully* to take it up, and bear it after our *General*, who as he hath encouraged us by his own *example*, and the glorious *reward* he hath ſet before

before us, ſo alſo doth he give us preſent *ſtrength* enough for ſuch a burden. Conſider, I beſeech you, how 'tis very poſſible, that all thoſe things which you count certain *comforts*, and therefore think us fools in denying them unto our ſelves, may yet be *no* ſuch *comforts* unto *us*, as they ſeem to *you*: and alſo that thoſe things which you call certain *evils*; and we, in your opinion, do fooliſhly undergo; may yet appear *no evils* unto *us*, or far *leſs* than they do to *you*: we may poſſibly therefore much more freely part with the *former*, and with much more chearfulneſs ſuffer the *later*, and be no ſuch *fools* in either, as *you* ſuppoſe; ſeeing you have much different thoughts of theſe things from *thoſe* which *we* have of them. Yea whileſt we willingly let paſs unregarded many preſent *pleaſing* and *profitable* things, and as chearfully undergo things *unpleaſant* and *hurtful*, for *uncertain* things to come in a future *uncertain* life, as you ſuppoſe; you mightily miſtake, if you think it ſo great a grievance to *us*, whoſe *faith* and *hope* are as *ſtrong* and *high*, as *your's* are *weak* and *low*. Nay, had we no ſuch height of confidence, yet the bare *conſideration* of but a *poſſible*, though *uncertain eternity* of joy or ſorrow, muſt needs be enough to make a wiſe man for his own *ſafeties*-ſake, to chuſe ſomething leſs *eaſie* or *comfortable* here, to *ſecure* himſelf for ever.

Theſe things, I know, will not eaſily be driven into men of *your* complexion. You have already *prejudiced* your palate by a too greedy feeding on the things you *love* beſt, at *firſt* taſte to reliſh the *ſweetneſs* I now ſpeak of. Neither is it poſſible you

ſhould

ſhould *ever* be ſenſible of it, except you can perſwade your ſelf for ſome time to uſe *abſtinence*, and ſet your ſelf in good earneſt to make ſome new experiments. Whether you will be at the coſt and pains thus to do, I know not: but I hope I may however obtain this *eaſie* favour at your hand, not to think that all mens *palates* are *alike*, and juſt of the *ſame* temper with your *own*. You cannot but know the great *variety* of mens *guſts*, and how that ſome men take as much pleaſure in chewing *Aloes*, as others do in *Sugar*. The *Chriſtians* temper being ſo widely different from *yours*, think it not *unreaſonable* in him to *delight* in what you *loath* and *hate*: or if you will go on to *laugh* at him for ſo doing, you muſt grant that he hath the very *ſame* cauſe of *deriding* you, though his greater *charity* forbid it. Nay, think it not impoſſible, that, if you ſhould a-while *examine his* reaſons, and make trial of *his* courſe of life, you might perceive a ſtrange *change* in *your own* affections and deſires.

And truly that *one conſideration* which I have already commended to you, of the *ſafety* of the *Chriſtians* courſe of life, and the *hazards* which attend your own, ſhould (a man would think) prevail upon you, to *try* ſome farther experiments, before you *die*; and not run on ſo *confidently* in thoſe ways, which, if there be an *Hell*, muſt certainly bring you to it. Think a little with your ſelf, if this Letter ſhould have found you ready to *breath* out your *laſt*, and going you know not whither; what *fears* and *jealouſies* it would poſſibly have ſtirr'd up in you; and in the midſt of what *doubts* and *diſtractions* your

fearful

fearful Soul would then have expired; when you ſhould have look'd upon your condition as then *deſperate*, an *eternity*, for ought you know at hand; all the *time* already ſpent which ſhould have fitted you for a comfortable entrance into it, and yet no proviſion at all made for it. I hope this paper will come more *timely* to your hand: wherein my deſign is only to *ſtartle* you at preſent out of the *Scorners chair*, and from that *couch* of *ſecurity* whereon you now *dream*, and I am loth to ſee you *ſleep* to *death*. If I may be ſo happy as to *rouze* you up a little, and perſwade you to look about you, and *conſider* the *dangers* which ſurround you, I ſhall yet hope that this very *conſideration* will beget *caution*, and *that* an unwearied *diligence*, and a conſtant *attendance* on the means of better diſcoveries: even till at laſt you embrace that *Faith* which you have *ignorantly* Scoffed at, and by it arrive at that eternal *happineſs*, for which you have, together with theſe poor *endeavours*, the heartieſt *prayers* of ——— *SIR*,

Yours in all honeſt ſervices,
as he ſhall be able.

Prov. XIV. 6.

A Scorner ſeeketh wiſdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is eaſie unto him that underſtandeth.

IMPRIMATUR
GEO. HOOPER,
Rmo. Arch. Cant. a Sacr. Dom.

THE END.